

June 6, 2018

Dear ~~~,

My name is Lynda Kiernan, and I am a Gold Star Mother from Massachusetts. My son, PFC W. Becket Kiernan USMC died on February 5, 2018 at the age of 18 while stationed at Twentynine Palms, CA.

Please bear with me - it is so crucially important to me that you know who my son Becket was, the circumstances around his death, and my mission to bring about changes that will better ensure the physical well-being of all Marines, soldiers, sailors, and airmen.

Becket's goal his entire life was to be a U.S. Marine. Since he was little his focus on that goal was amazing to witness. After shipping out on September 5, 2017, he achieved this goal on November 22, 2017.

I largely raised Becket and his sisters, Maegan and Mallory, on my own, and the four of us were always extremely close. He was an honors and advanced placement student at Old Rochester Regional High School in Mattapoisett, MA, and he was humble, kind, funny, brilliantly smart, and giving - but also tough as nails!

Becket was a scholar-warrior. He was an avid reader, especially of military history - from reading the Art of War, to pieces written about every conflict and war throughout history, to pieces written by contemporary Marines - he absorbed it all.

He truly lived the tenants of selfless leadership, generosity of spirit, loyalty, honor, character, and service. Growing up, he dedicated seven years to the Young Marines, joining at little more than 10 years old. Over those years his leadership and character saw him climb the ranks to achieve Sergeant Major of the New England Regiment, where he personally cared about the well-being, safety, and advancement of hundreds of Young Marines.

Becket also single-handedly launched consecutive yearly Toys for Tots campaigns. In his final year before enlisting in the Corps he collected more than 1,000 toys for disadvantaged children.

He was also the Color Sergeant for the Color Guard of his Fall River Young Marine Unit, and participated in countless community service events.

One of Becket's greatest gifts was his ability to make people see the good and the great potential in themselves. He inspired people. He made people believe in themselves, and he would often check in, asking "Are you ok?". He attended many leadership schools across the country, and organized and directed encampments for hundreds of Young Marines, while he himself was still a teenager... and he always made sure he ate last.

For about two years before he enlisted at 17, Becket and I went back and forth about the course he was to take to achieve his goals. He was so brilliant, I wanted him to continue school and go through OCS. But he was adamant - he wanted to enlist as infantry in the Corps and go on to be a "Mustang", telling me that he felt he couldn't be the most effective leader unless he walked in the shoes of those he was leading.

His recruiter told him that infantry was closed, so Becket opted for Communications - Radio Field Operator (0621) which brought him eventually to Twentynine Palms. (Long-term plans included wanting to go on to Embassy duty).

As I mentioned above, Becket and I were very close, and when he was able to, we spoke almost every evening. Soon after getting to Twentynine Palms, Becket told me he was sick and his neck was swollen. I told him to please not try to tough-it-out and to please go to medical (AMCC). He did - and was told he had the flu, and to give money to his roommates to buy and bring him Gatorade, food, and Tylenol, Which they did for a while. Becket never gave up - he kept pushing every day. I believe he went to medical twice, and was told the same thing both times - that he had the flu (although I don't believe he was ever tested for the flu).

I later found out that soon after these trips to AMCC, Becket was taken out of training *by ambulance* on Friday, February 2 to the Emergency Room at the base hospital - because his *skin was turning blue* and he had *severe pain in his hip and his leg*. ***He was once again told he had the flu! (however, again, I don't believe he was ever tested for the flu because it would have been negative and these are certainly not the symptoms of the flu). He was sent back to his barracks and given two days SIQ. The problem however, was that Becket had run out of money - he had no more money to give his roommate to get him supplies and he was not allowed out of his room.***

So he asked his roommate to front him some money and to purchase him some more Tylenol, Gatorade, and a bit of food. Initially his roommate said yes and left the barracks. But when he returned, he didn't have anything for Becket, and said "Sorry buddy, I forgot."

My son, spent the last two days of his life - dying in his barracks - without food or even Gatorade or Tylenol.

On Sunday Feb 4 at 5:30 am his local time (8:30 am my time) Becket called me and said he didn't sleep at all the past few nights because his hip and leg hurt so bad. I begged him to break SIQ and to go to the Officer on Duty saying he needed an ambulance to take him back to the ER. He did, and was taken back to the base hospital a second time, I was relieved thinking that now he would get the care he needed.

However, that night around 10:30 or 11 pm, I received a call from a doctor at the Desert Regional Medical Center in Palm Springs (about an hour away from base) saying that my son had been transferred to their hospital from the base hospital. They thought that he had either a blood clot in his leg or an infection, and said that they would do some preliminary tests and call me back.

At 1am I received another call from the same doctor telling me that tests showed that Becket had a massive infection in his hip and leg and that I needed to come out to California ASAP. I live on Cape Cod, and was in Boston and on the first flight to Palm Springs by 5:45 am.

Because there are no direct flights from Boston to Palm Springs, CA, I had a hold over in Chicago. When I got to O'Hare airport I frantically called the same doctor back at the Regional Medical Center for an update on Becket. They were evasive, but eventually told me that they did an operation called a fasciotomy, and in doing so discovered that Becket had Necrotizing fasciitis, - flesh eating bacteria. Then they told me "Anyone who loves this boy needs to be here....**right now.**" I was panicked and screaming, begging them to tell him that I'm coming - but I still had to take another four-hour flight.

I still had not been contacted by the Marine Corps or anyone from Twentynine Palms. This is because they did not yet even know what was happening with my son. The base ER had not informed Becket's chain of command about his condition, or the fact that he had been transferred off base to another facility.

The Desert Regional Medical Center called the base to inform them that they had Becket - but not until Monday morning. Once informed, three Marines raced out to Desert Regional, but by the time they arrived, the doctors were trying to resuscitate Becket, and they were not allowed near him.

When I landed in Palm Springs at 12:30 pm local time, there were three Marines in civilian clothes waiting for me at the gate. They took me into a small storage room and told me that Becket had died at 10:30 that morning. I didn't make it in time.

My son - a Marine of high caliber - was left **alone** in his room without medicine or even Gatorade - suffered **alone** without being checked on - had to get himself to the base ER **alone** -

was transferred off-base **alone** to the Desert Regional Medical Center without anyone in his chain of command being notified - where he died **alone** at 18 years old.

There are no words in the English language to convey how my heart is broken in a million pieces - how I am haunted by these realizations - and how shattered I am. My soul is screaming every day from the horror of it all.

I am formally requesting an investigation be launched by the Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery into the negligent, careless, and dismissive medical "treatment" provided by the AMCC and base ER to my son, and to entry level Marines at Twentynine Palms. My son, and all Marines deserve so much better.

My mission - the one thing keeping me going - is to see changes made to the procedures having to do with the oversight of sick or injured Marines, SIQ Marines, with particular focus on entry-level Marines who are so new...still so young.

I am working with the staff and Becket's chain of command at Twentynine Palms, and traveled back to the base May 11-18 to meet with Lt. Col Woodward, Master Sergeant Jason Tavano, Major Devlin O'Shea, and others in Becket's chain of command. The Corps has been extremely receptive and very quick to implement new policies on base for Company B, and I am very proud of the work that has been accomplished, in particular, by Master Sergeant Jason Tavano, and Major Devlin O'Shea.

These changes include:

- ~ Daily sick call at 0700, with chain of command being informed which Marines are sick, their platoon, instructor, time out, and prognosis.
- ~ If a Marine needs to be transported to the ER from AMCC the chain of command will be notified. No Marine will go alone, and Company B operations will arrange transportation to and from.
- ~ The accompanying Marine will notify the chain of command of the "five W's" and when the sick Marine can be transported back to their barracks.
- ~ If a Marine is formally admitted to the ER on either duty or non-duty days, the chain of command will make a visit to the ER to be briefed by the ER staff on the situation. This visit will be conducted by the Instructor, the Chief Instructor, the SNCOIC, or OIC.
- ~ If a Marine needs a referral to a specialist either on, or off base, this information is to be given to the chain of command by the Marine with the date, time, and prognosis, so that movement to the specialist can be arranged.
- ~ If a Marine needs surgery, this information is to go to the chain of command to sign, so all involved understand the obligation and recovery time. The platoon should be made aware of all surgeries with a copy given to HQ to ensure it is on the calendar and tracked, and so Limited

Duty can be planned and does not exceed what is necessary.

~Visitation will happen during recovery.

SIQ Marines:

~ Each SIQ Marine will be checked every three to four hours by the OOD to assess their status - and both the OOD and the sick Marine will sign a logbook showing that the check-in has been conducted.

~ Each SIQ Marine will be asked when they last ate and hydrated, and if the Marine needs supplies (eg: food, or gatorade etc.), these will be obtained and provided.

~At the end of day the Company GySgt or 1stSgt will make sure the OOD is briefed and given an SIQ check-on sheet.

Point of Contact:

~The Company GySgt will make sure that Company B has an updated point of contact list for the AMCC, the base ER, and the ERs at the region's surrounding medical centers. The Company GySgt will also make sure that the AMCC, base ER, and surrounding medical centers will have an updated point of contact list for Company B to ensure that all communication of information regarding sick or injured Marines is not delayed.

When Becket was young and I knew he was destined to enlist, the Marine Corps credos of "*No man left behind*" and "*We are a Brotherhood*" and "*We take care of our own*" actually reassured me. But in reality, when Becket was sick and dying, the existing medical system left him behind again and again - and he died alone.

However, the staff at Twentynine Palms, especially Master Sergeant Jason Tavano, have been very helpful and proactive in actively pushing for changes to Company B's medical policies to be formulated, realized, and adopted. It is as if Master Sergeant Tavano has gone back for Becket.

One important change that I strongly feel is key for Company B is the establishment of a Battalion Aid Station dedicated solely to the medical treatment of entry level Marines. If funding can be secured, this station is to be established in proximity to where entry level Marines live and train - as often, upon arrival, entry level Marines do not yet know where medical services are located on base, or how to access and navigate these services. The

Comms school has as many as 1,500 to 2,000 entry level Marines at any given time - these numbers alone warrant such a dedicated Battalion Aid Station.

Once there is a working model for medical oversight for sick and SIQ Marines, including a dedicated Battalion Aid Station to care for entry level Marines at Twentynine Palms, my mission is to ensure that this model is then adopted and replicated at bases across the entire Corps. And possibly, one day, across all branches of the U.S. armed forces.

I ask, in Becket's name, if there is any way that you can help me....if there is any way you can lend your name and position of power to securing the necessary resources and funding to achieve this mission beginning at Twentynine Palms, please...please do.

Becket was a stellar Marine and would have gone on to a spectacular career. If the Corps only knew the magnitude of what it lost on February 5, 2018... All that is left to the Corps now, is to work to ensure that the same doesn't happen to another Marine.

Sincerely,

Lynda Kiernan
Gold Star Mother - USMC

